(d) if so, the details thereof along with status of the proposed?

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (d) The suggestions in the Memorandum submitted by Government of Orissa included setting up of a research station by Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) in Kandhamal district of Orissa to study the problem of quality of the spices grown in the district and setting up a branch of Spices Board to provide market intelligence to the farmers and to market the spices.

In order to help farmers to get remunerative prices for their agricultural produce, Government of India announces in each season Minimum Support Prices (MSPs) for major agricultural commodities like paddy, wheat, oilseeds etc. and organizes purchase operations through public and cooperative agencies. A Market Intervention Scheme is in operation to be implemented on the request of State/U.T Government for procurement of agriculture and horticulture commodities generally perishable in nature and not covered under MSP, to protect the farmers from making distress sales in the event of fall in prices below economic level/cost of production.

In order to facilitate better price realization by the farmers through improved marketing opportunities, Government has taken a number of initiatives to implement market reforms in agriculture.

The Spices Board collects and publishes the domestic and international prices of spices on a weekly basis. Suggestion to set up a branch office of Spices Board in Kandhamal district was not found feasible by the Board.

As regards the suggestion to set up an ICAR research station in the district of Kandhamal, it was not found feasible by ICAR in view of the existing facilities available in Orissa for research on spices.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

552. SHRI MAHENDRA MOHAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware of the spread of demand for organic food items in the country;

(b) if so, the status of the existing demand, supply, consumption and production of the organic food products in the country; and

(c) Government's plans and projections, if any, for the coming years in respect of this improved variety of food products?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) As per a survey conducted by International Competence Centre of Organic Agriculture (ICCOA), a Bangalore-based private NGO, the total market potential of organic foods is about Rs.2300 crore.

As per the information collected by the National Centre of Organic Farming (NCOF), total production of organic food/fibre and other organic commodities was 4.90 lakh metric tonne during the year 2006-07.

(c) To ensure good quality of food products under organic farming a quality assurance system has been notified by Ministry of Commerce under "National Programme on Organic Production (NPOP).

Under the National Project on Organic Farming, efforts are made to promote organic farming through:

(i) Financial support to organic inputs production infrastructure.

(ii) Awareness creation and Human Resource Development through trainings, demonstrations, seminars etc.

(iii) Capacity building through Service Providers.

Suicide by farmers

553. SHRI PRAKASH JAVADEKAR: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) how many farmers have committed suicide in Vidharba region and other parts of the country since 01 January, 2009 and the details thereof; and

(b) the details of measures being taken by Government or proposed to be taken, to counter this trend of suicides even after compensation packages were doled out?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) and (b) In 2008-09, the suicides by farmers have been reported from the States of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat only. A Statement indicating the number of suicides during the last three years, as reported by the State Governments till date, is enclosed (*See* below).

To address the problem of suicide by farmers, the Government of India approved a rehabilitation package of Rs. 16978.69 crore for 31 Districts in the four States of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala reporting comparatively higher number of suicides by farmers in 2006-07. The package being implemented includes both immediate and medium term measures. Measures taken by Government include implementation of the Scheme of debt waiver and debt relief for farmers announced in the Union Budget 2008-09 to address the problem of indebtedness of farmers. The scheme, implemented by Ministry of Finance, is estimated to benefit 3.68 crore farmers with total waiver and relief amounting to Rs.65318.33 crore. Measures taken by Government for revitalization of agriculture sector include launching of new schemes, namely, National Food Security Mission to improve production and productivity of foodgrains and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana with an objective to improve growth rate of agriculture and allied sectors and to incentivise the States so as to increase public investment in agriculture and allied sectors.